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Great Dualisms in the History of Philosophy and Their Reflection (and Impact/ Contribution) **in Contemporary Policies of Freedom**

Abstract: *This article explores the underemphasized link between major dualisms in the history and present of philosophy – matter vs. spirit and individual vs. society – and major contemporary political doctrines and policies, namely conservatism, liberalism, socialism, environmentalism, communism, and nationalism. The heuristic-analytic approach is conducted within three analytical frameworks: balanced – imbalanced, harmonious – antagonistic, functional – dysfunctional.*

Introduction

Conservatism, liberalism, socialism / social democracy, environmentalism, communism, nationalism / suveranism are among the most well-known, prevalent, and applied types of policies / political doctrines in contemporary societies. These are supported, founded, and shaped by political theories / sciences, political scientists, and specific ideologies, but to a large extent, they have deep roots, foundations, explanations, and models in the broad sphere of philosophy, in the history of philosophy. However, if a maximal "paradigmatic" reduction of the philosophical models that underpin the most important contemporary doctrines and policies worldwide is attempted, it becomes apparent, in our view, that they largely reduce to a dualist modeling. This involves two major dualisms: the matter / materialism – spirit / spiritualism dualism, and the individual / person – community / society dualism. In light of this observation, regarding the theme that targets policies of freedom / liberty and individual human rights, which we prioritize in this opinion article, the correspondence between the great contemporary political doctrines and the great philosophical dualisms of matter-spirit and individual-community reveals itself to be profound and complex, traversing epochs, currents, and diverse thinkers, from the ancients to the contemporaries.

Conservatism, liberalism, socialism / social democracy, environmentalism, communism, nationalism / suveranism, and other significant contemporary doctrines and policies reflect, incorporate, and apply these dualisms, as affirmed in the history and present of philosophy, but – an aspect we highlight and analyze particularly in this article – they do so in varied and complex ways. Therefore, we will discuss in this article, in this sense, dualisms that are balanced or imbalanced, harmonious or antagonistic, functional or dysfunctional. These dualisms can be represented as variables that particularly describe the philosophical-ideological profile of each political doctrine we refer to.

Thus, we will observe that all the ideologies, doctrines, and contemporary policies we bring to attention have roots, foundations, and philosophical models in the dualist paradigm, through the two great dualisms, matter / materialism – spirit / spiritualism and individual / person – community / society, but the way these dualisms reflect, underpin, or shape each of these ideologies, doctrines, or policies in relation to the issue of liberty and individual human rights varies within ranges determined by the framework of analysis used. This includes balanced – imbalanced dualism, harmonious – antagonistic dualism, functional – dysfunctional dualism, as well as the oscillation, intensity, and specificity / context of each dualism’s manifestation.

For instance, contemporary political conservatism, in relation to the two great dualisms of matter / materialism – spirit / spiritualism and individual / person – community / society, is registered as slightly imbalanced and antagonistic, as well as relatively functional in terms of maintaining order and stability.

Conservatism, Freedom, Philosophy and Dualism

Conservatism, a political doctrine that values tradition, order, and continuity, has strong roots, explanations, and foundations in the great philosophical dualisms of matter-spirit and individual-community, as established throughout the history of philosophy.

In antiquity, Plato considered the material world imperfect and changing, in contrast to the world of ideas, which is perfect and immutable. Conservatism reflects this unbalanced dualism by prioritizing immutable values, community, and traditions that transcend the immediate material world. In the medieval period, Thomas Aquinas promoted an imbalanced dualism by prioritizing divine order over earthly, human order, and the supernatural over the natural. Aquinas argued that divine laws govern human life and destiny, and individuals are responsible before God. Conservatism reflects this view by valuing religious traditions and the social order established by God. While imbalanced, this dualism is relatively harmonious and functional, as the supernatural order is seen as being in harmony with society, thus reinforcing social stability and continuity. In the modern era, Descartes revived the matter-spirit dualism, separating mind from body. Conservatism can be associated with this view through its insistence on logical order in the face of chaotic and rapid material changes. Descartes influenced conservative thought by suggesting that changes should be well-considered and controlled, avoiding major disruptions in the social structure. This dualism is somewhat imbalanced and antagonistic, favoring reason and order over matter and change, but it is relatively functional in promoting stability and continuity. Other pillars of modern conservative thought, such as Richard Hooker, Hugo Grotius, Edmund Burke, Joseph de Maistre, Louis de Bonald, Friedrich von Gentz, and others, have theorized, promoted, and highlighted the importance of tradition and continuity in the proper functioning of society. They emphasized values and a vertical reference to the ideal of personal freedom and fulfillment through virtue, honesty, work, balance, and solidarity. Most of them viewed revolutions and radical changes as threats to social balance and community stability, advocating for progress through gradual reforms that respect inherited traditions and values. This dualism is slightly imbalanced but ensures a relatively functional relationship between the individual and the community through the continuity of traditions and the maintenance of historically established social order.

In contemporary times, thinkers like Roger Scruton, Michael Oakeshott, Allan Bloom, Leo Strauss, and Irving Kristol argue that politics should maintain order and continuity based on great values and virtues, on the classical ethics of coexistence, on religion, and on love-based coexistence, rather than on imposing and promoting abstract or utopian ideals related to personal freedom and fulfillment. These rights should result from the good cohesion and functioning of the community / society as a whole, not from abstract principles promoted by so-called humanistic and positive psychologies or from so-called natural, egotistical, and unlimited individual rights / principles.

Essentially, contemporary doctrinal-political conservatism is deeply interconnected with the relatively imbalanced yet somewhat harmonious and functional philosophical dualisms of matter-spirit and individual-community. Guided by these philosophical-ideological visions, conservative ideologies, doctrines, and policies remain faithful to these dualisms, seeking to preserve traditions, stability, and continuity. However, in light of the evolving contemporary society and accelerated technological progress, they are increasingly concerned with maintaining a balance between the common good and individual freedom, between stability and change, and between tradition and progress, thus tending towards a more balanced, harmonious, and functional dualism, where freedom is not prioritized but neither oppressed.

Liberalism, Freedom, Philosophy and Dualism

Like political conservatism and any other political doctrine that inherently reflects or expresses significant dualisms from the history of philosophy, political liberalism also embodies this foundational dualism. At first glance, it might appear to be underpinned by a consistent monism. However, contemporary liberalism, as a political doctrine

primarily centered on individual freedom and fundamental human rights, overwhelmingly finds its roots, foundations, and theoretical models in dualist thought and philosophy. This dualism, specifically the individual-community dualism, prioritizes the individual and their freedom without absolutizing them. This imbalanced dualism has been explored and developed by philosophers throughout history and significantly explains and underpins contemporary Western political liberalism.

A true philosophy of freedom began to develop in the modern era, but the analysis must start with ancient philosophy. From antiquity, we remember Protagoras's maxim, "Man is the measure of all things". In ancient Rome, Cicero elaborated on the concepts of natural law and citizens' rights, which can be considered one of the ancient philosophical premises of contemporary political liberalism. The Middle Ages liberty was understood as liberation from sin and the possibility of choosing good. Individual rights were seen merely as divine gifts. Concepts such as free will and personhood were discussed, albeit in a Christian context, and can be seen as modest contributions to the evolution of human society towards the authentic affirmation of the idea of freedom and human rights. Modernity marked a radical shift in philosophical paradigms and duality in thinking about freedom and individual rights with the rise of rationalism and Enlightenment, particularly through thinkers like John Locke, Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville. John Locke, considered the father of classical liberalism, argued in "Two Treatises of Government," with a dual-imbalanced vision prioritizing the human being, that people have natural, inalienable rights to life, liberty, and property, and that government exists to protect these rights. John Stuart Mill emphasized the importance of freedom of expression and individual liberty as fundamental to personal development and social progress. In "On Liberty," Mill introduces ”the harm principle”, asserting that the only justification for interfering with an individual's liberty is to prevent harm to others. This idea became a pillar of liberal thought, profoundly influencing contemporary policies and legislation regarding individual rights.

In contemporary times, philosophers and intellectual figures like Isaiah Berlin, Robert Nozick, Murray Rothbard, David Friedman, Ayn Rand, Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, and Hans-Hermann Hoppe debates about freedom and individual rights continue to be central to political philosophy. Isaiah Berlin made a significant contribution with his distinction between positive and negative liberty. Robert Nozick, in "Anarchy, State, and Utopia," defended a libertarian vision of society, arguing that the state should be minimal, intervening only to protect individual rights. The reflections of these philosophers have contributed to the formation of contemporary liberal political doctrine, which emphasizes protecting individual rights and limiting state power. This doctrine influences not only the internal policies of states but also international relations, promoting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law as foundations of a just and free society.

From this brief overview of the history of philosophical thought on the issue of liberty and individual rights, concerning contemporary liberal ideology, doctrine, and politics, we can observe that great thinkers and philosophers have almost always operated within a paradigm of imbalanced dualism, prioritizing freedom and individual rights without absolutizing theml. This imbalanced dualist vision is undeniable, but as with political conservatism, it also represents a relatively harmonious and functional dualism, with the philosophical-ideological and doctrinal sense inverted, freedom being a central value and practice.

Socialism, Freedom, Philosophy and Dualism

Contemporary socialism also have their philosophical roots in a variety of ideas and models asserted throughout different historical eras.

Aristotle emphasized the individual-community dualism, slightly imbalanced by prioritizing the city-state and community. In his politics, Aristotle argued that man is by nature a "political animal," destined to live in community. This view invokes an imbalanced dualism by stressing the importance of the community over the individual, defined more by their belonging to the city-state than by their inherent attributes related to the ideal of personal liberty and fulfillment. Thomas Aquinas, in "Summa Theologica," emphasized the importance of charity and social justice. This vision reflects a slightly antagonistic dualism between individual and community, suggesting that social justice and solidarity are essential for a well-ordered society. Thomas Hobbes, in "Leviathan," argued from a slightly unbalanced dualist perspective that individuals must surrender certain liberties to ensure collective order and security, emphasizing the need for a strong government to maintain balance between individual and community interests.

In the contemporary era, philosophers such as Eduard Bernstein, Zygmunt Bauman, Michael Sandel, Axel Honneth, Thomas Piketty, Nancy Fraser, and Slavoj Žižek have sought to find a practical balance between socialist ideals and the economic realities of capitalism. Eduard Bernstein, in "The Preconditions of Socialism and the Tasks of Social Democracy," promoted a gradualist approach, arguing that democratic reforms and political evolution could lead to a more just society. He suggested that the matter-spirit dispute could be reconciled through government interventions that ensure material well-being while protecting individual rights and freedoms. Bernstein also emphasized the importance of balancing individual and collective interests, proposing policies that promote solidarity and social cohesion. Thus, contemporary socialism, as ideology and political doctrine, are deeply rooted, argued, and augmented by various philosophical ideas and models, including dualistic ones, that have been established throughout history. These philosophical ideas and dualities can be represented as variabilities recorded on the two ideological dualisms, matter-spirit and individual-community, involving the ongoing struggle between material needs and spiritual aspirations, as well as between individual autonomy and collective responsibility.

The dualisms established in the sphere of socialist political ideas and doctrines are not as imbalanced as in the case of communist ideologies, doctrines, and policies, but they do reflect a prioritization of the social factor over the individual and the material over the spiritual, focusing not on individual freedom and well-being, but on social cohesion, social justice and collective well-being, even if at the level of philosophy, in the spirit of a balanced and functional dualism, freedom is claimed as an important value.

Ecologism / Environmentalism, Freedom, Philosophy and Dualism

Political-ideological ecologism / environmentalism has established itself as a concern for the natural environment, but also, in a broad sense, encompassing human society and social dynamics. Although not always viewed through contemporary ecological perspectives, these issues have been explored in a dualistic manner by philosophers of various orientations throughout the centuries.

Aristotle proposed a dualism in which form and matter are inseparable, each contributing to the existence and functioning of the other. This non-antagonistic vision was fundamental to medieval thought, where theologians like Thomas Aquinas sought to reconcile Christian theology with Aristotelian philosophy, suggesting that the material and spiritual worlds are interdependent, forming a whole under the divine. In the modern era, Kant attempted to mediate the matter-spirit dualism through his critical theory, suggesting that human experience is shaped by so-called "a priori" structures, somewhat similar to the Platonic holistic "forms."

Today, thinkers like like Aldo Leopold, Arne Næss, Murray Bookchin, Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood, James Lovelock, Timothy Morton, Theodore Roszak, Joanna Macy, David Abram, and others, promote sustainability and the harmonization of all elements, factors, and entities that make up contemporary human existence. This includes not only natural environmental factors but also technological progress, artificial intelligence, and spiritual aspects. Aldo Leopold and Arne Næss have supported the land ethic and deep ecology, respectively, arguing that true freedom can only be achieved through a harmonious and respectful relationship between humans, the natural environment, and technological surroundings.

Thus, in light of the philosophical arguments presented, we can see how political-ideological environmentalism represents not only a reaction to contemporary ecological problems but also an expression of the harmonization of fundamental philosophical dualisms. By reevaluating and reconfiguring these dualisms, political environmentalism promotes a balanced, harmonious, and functional vision capable of addressing the complex challenges of the modern world as a whole, with increased interest in sustainability and less in freedom, without this being disregarded.

Comunism, Freedom, Philosophy and Dualism

Communism, as a materialist theory, philosophy, ideology, doctrine, and political system, emphasizes material reality, denying the existence of the soul or transcendence, and prioritizes the collective over the individual, thereby disregarding personal freedom and self-determination.

Historically, this perspective aligns with the matter-spirit dualism promoted by philosophers like Democritus, who believed that all phenomena are composed of material atoms. As ideology and political doctrine place a strong emphasis on the collective, viewing the individual as an integral part of a larger social organism. This stance aligns to some extent with the imbalanced individual-community dualism promoted by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Leon Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci, Mao Zedong, and others, who argued that the general will, the collective expression of society, takes precedence over individual interests and freedom. Karl Marx in "Capital," argued that capitalist economic structures create a profound alienation between workers and the products of their labor, between material needs and spiritual aspirations. He contended that true liberation of the individual can only be achieved through the abolition of private property and the establishment of a communist society, where resources are collectively owned and managed.

Communism, therefore, appears to favor an extremely imbalanced dualism, excessively emphasizing the collective at the expense of the individual. In practice, this often led to the near-total suppression of individual freedoms and power abuses. The contemporary collapse of this doctrine and political system can be interpreted through the almost entirely imbalanced, antagonistic, and dysfunctional dualisms that characterize its ideology and philosophy, which, among other things, not only does not prioritize, freedom and individual right, but harshly oppresse them.

Nationalism, Freedom, Philosophy and Dualism

Elements of ethnicity, nationality, culture, geography, and history are implicated in this political doctrine, in which the issue of freedom and individual rights is often relegated to a secondary position. Though the concept of nation and its related political doctrines have been established since the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, the philosophical ideas that prefigured them were not absent even in antiquity.

Plato, with his theory of the ideal polis, emphasized, in a dualistic-unbalanced note, the importance of the community as superior to the individual, and this vision can be considered a precursor to today's nationalist ideas. Among other relevant philosophers who can be associated or who have narrated, we believe, in a more or less emphasized dualistic note, on the nationalist theme are Jean Bodin and Dante Alighieri from the medieval period, Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Giuseppe Mazzini from the modern period, as well as Carl Schmitt and Jürgen Habermas from the contemporary period.

In essence, nationalism, as political doctrines, can be interpreted as strongly unbalanced dualism, placing excessive emphasis on national identity at the expense of individual diversity, freedom and universal human rights. Can also be seen as antagonistic dualism, presenting a worldview in which the individual as an independent person is contrasted with the ethnic group or nation, or nations are rival entities. Moreover, nationalism, as unbalanced, disharmonious, and antagonistic dualism often lead to political and economic instability, with emphasis on national identity potentially leading to pronounced social division based on identity criteria, chauvinism, discrimination, and corruption, which make societies, if they are not homogeneous from an ethnic or national point of view, also be characterized as dysfunctional from a constitutional point of view, explained through disharmonious dualisms of all types. In such societies, the value and practice of freedom can become severely marginalized and even harshly oppressed, interpreted in the individual-society/nation dualistic paradigm as strongly unbalanced, antagonistic and dysfunctional.

Instead of Conclusions

After were brought to attention these dualisms from the history and present of philosophy and we have speculated on how they explain, substantiate or shape some of the great contemporary ideologies, doctrines and policies from the perspective of the values, ideals and practices of freedom and individual rights, we believe that, from here, we can continue and bring to an end this article with some questions. These questions remain open for exploration in a future article, its continuation. Until then, we welcome contributions from our readers with ideas, solutions, and answers that we could incorporate into the projected article. Please share your thoughts via email at

petrustefaroi@yahoo.com. In the event of significant contributions, contributors may, if they wish, become co-authors.

The questions are:

- Can one operate with this philosophical, dualistic paradigm, encompassing the two great dualisms (matter/materialism – spirit/spiritualism and individual/person – community/society), and their variables/frames of analysis (balanced – unbalanced, harmonious – antagonistic, functional – dysfunctional), when aiming to represent the global political-doctrinal system and the universal, relatively unitary vision of the contemporary global ideological, doctrinal, and political landscape?
- Is such a paradigm viable, appropriate, and applicable on a large, universal, global scale?
- Does it correspond to and justify itself within cardinal anthropo-philosophical categories of human existence, for humanity in its entirety, such as human nature, essence, or condition? Is human nature, essence, and condition dual?
- Is it possible to achieve a characterization, also representable through a graphic model, and, finally, a global political-doctrinal profile on the theme of freedom and human rights, using this dualistic philosophical tool of analysis?